

The Evening Star

With Sunday Morning Edition

STATINTL

No Time for Rhetoric

Chairman Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee raised more questions than he answered in describing the situation in Iraq as the "most dangerous" cold war crisis today. In doing this, Mr. Fulbright was repeating, and agreeing with, closed-door testimony by Director Allen W. Dulles of the Central Intelligence Agency before the Senate committee.

Whether the Iraqi problem is a threat that the country might be taken over at any moment by the communists, as either an open or a "hidden" agent of the Soviet Union, or the "most dangerous" or something slighter, as implied by President Eisenhower at his news conference, is only relative. Russian penetration of the Middle East is a high-priority objective that predates communism, but that has come closest to success in recent years. If Iraq succeeds now in Iraq, located virtually in the center of the area, it will be in strategic position to spread in all directions—including beyond the Middle East proper to Africa and Asia.

In a sense, Mr. Fulbright is correct in saying that this threat has arisen because of "a lack of a positive policy by the free nations." In another sense, it might be charged that there have been too many "positive" policies in which the only common denominator has been a seeming disregard, or misunderstanding, of the Arab peoples who inhabit the area. Britain, slow to shed the imperialist thinking of the 19th century, has never quite accepted Arab nationalism as a valid force. It has withdrawn militarily as well as politically from one of these countries after another, under pressure of crisis—and attempted to return to Egypt by a violent invasion of the Suez zone.

Our own, relatively good postwar standing was compromised in Arab eyes by our position on the founding of Israel. It has been left murky by our on-again-off-again dealings with the Egyptian government of Colonel Nasser—encouraging the belief we would aid in his Aswan Dam project, then withdrawing from it; bringing pressure to stop the Suez invasion, then freezing Egyptian assets and declining to supply the arms aid that Cairo later obtained from behind the Iron Curtain. Senator Fulbright asks "how far can we rely on Nasser?" Cairo might well ask how far Nasser can rely on us.

With all this said, and there is enough blame for everybody, including the Arabs themselves, the fact remains that entrenchment of a Soviet-controlled communism in the Middle East would be a vast tragedy for all except the Kremlin. If Chairman Fulbright, who rightly deplores the situation and current shortcomings of policy, has a corrective formula there could be no better time to produce it.